

Department of Workforce Development Development of a Screening Tool for W-2 Participants

Background

Recent national research put out by the Institute for Women's Policy Research tells us that among single mothers receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), 38 percent have some level of disability and 25 percent have a disability that is severe. Data collected through DWD's automated case management system (a.k.a. CARES) suggests that far fewer Wisconsin Works (W-2) recipients have been identified as having a disability by their Financial and Employment Planner (FEP). Here's what is currently documented in CARES:

- 3% have AODA issues;
- 1% have learning disabilities;
- 8% have mental health issues;
- 16% have physical limitations;

Note: "cognitive barriers" is currently not an option to be entered in CARES. This will be added to a CARES table this fall.

Participant assessment has been a core function of the FEP since implementation of W-2. But as the Department began examining W-2 cases reaching their time limits, it became apparent that greater emphasis needed to be placed on upfront screening and assessment of participants. As a result, a work plan centering on screening and assessment was implemented early in 2001 that strengthened the focus on assessment in W-2 policy, performance standards, and W-2 agencies' program plans. Also under this initiative, work began to develop a W-2 screening process.

Why is the screening process so important?

The federal TANF and state W-2 time limits necessitate that employment barriers are identified and needs are addressed early on in an individual's participation. The screening tool will take some of the guess-work out of determining the level of service a participant needs. When properly administered, FEPs will be able to:

1. Use the results of the screening process to refer individuals who are at-risk of significant personal barriers to appropriate service providers for a functional assessment.
2. Apply the information provided through the functional assessment to the development of the Employability Plan. The Employability Plan outlines what is expected of participants to help them reach their employment goals. This may include:
 - obtaining needed medical treatment or counseling;
 - receiving needed services from other providers in the community; and
 - ensuring participants have the necessary accommodations to successfully engage in W-2 work training.

How has DWD gone about developing the screening tool?

Simultaneous to the development of the Department's workplan to strengthen the overall emphasis on screening and assessment, the Wisconsin State Legislature passed 2001 Wisconsin Act 16, requiring the Department to implement screening for domestic abuse among W-2 participants and training for W-2 agency staff in domestic abuse issues. Through the

Department's authority to promulgate rules for the administration of the W-2 program, amendments were made to DWD 12. The new rule language will include:

1. Changes prescribed by statute related to W-2 agency screening for domestic violence and training of agency workers in domestic violence; and
2. A requirement that W-2 agencies administer a functional screening process developed by the Department.

The opportunity to provide input on the rule changes was offered through a public hearing held on May 13, 2002. The rule amendments must go through a review process with the Legislature before final passage. Our efforts on this project have also been supported by the Milwaukee W-2 Advisory Panel and Wisconsin's W-2 advocacy community.

Early in 2002, a contract was awarded to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Center for Addiction and Behavioral Health Research to work with the Department on designing the tool. Concurrently, a workgroup was formed to participate in the review of the screening materials, provide feedback and be a sounding board for other potential issues. The workgroup members include disability experts from the Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS), a learning disability expert from the National Institute for Literacy, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation representatives, training curriculum writers, local W-2 agency representatives and DWD staff. In March, Administrator's Memo 02-08 was released informing W-2 agencies of the Department's plans to develop the screening tool and providing background information about the goals of implementing it.

The tool has been through several revisions based on workgroup discussion and the input of a number of disability experts. The end result is a three-tiered screening tool. A functional screen that looks at the ability of the participant to function in activities of daily living and a domestic violence screen will be completed with all new W-2 participants. Based on answers provided on the functional screen, a follow-up screen may be triggered that looks more closely at conditions that often go unidentified but are significant barriers to the participant becoming employed. Examples include learning disabilities, mental health problems such as depression or anxiety disorders, and substance abuse. The follow-up screen is a compilation of disability-focused screening tools that have been tested and found to be valid and reliable with similar populations in other states.

What are the next steps?

Field Testing

Eight W-2 agencies and approximately 25 FEPs are currently participating in a field test of the screening tool. Training for these FEPs was held in late July to help prepare them to administer the screening tool. The volunteer FEPs will also be documenting their general observations about the screening process.

Evaluation

The observations and screening outcomes documented through the field test process will inform UW-Milwaukee researchers and the Department about needed adjustments to the screening process. Key questions we hope to answer through the field test and ongoing evaluation include:

- Are the questions effective at identifying participants who are at risk of significant personal barriers to employment?
- How does the length of time of the screening impact on the overall interviewing process?
- What best practices are important to making the screening process work?

Automation

Automation of the screening tool will serve two purposes:

1. It will assist the FEP in scoring the results and storing of information; and
2. It will allow the Department to monitor W-2 agencies use of the tool and collect aggregate data on the types and prevalence of disabilities among the W-2 population.

The Department is just beginning work on automation and will be exploring web-based formats that will allow both ease of use by the FEP and rigorous security measures that will ensure confidentiality of the participant.

Training

Trainers from University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh, Center for Career Development and Employability Training (CCDET) are key figures in the development and implementation of the screening process. The field test training held in July was the result of CCDET's skilled trainers and curriculum writers. CCDET will use the field test curriculum as the basis to begin designing the full training course. FEPs must go through the training course before administering the tool to participants.

Implementation

A target date for statewide implementation of the screening tool is January 1, 2003. Beyond that date, we envision work continuing on the screening process in the form of technical assistance, training to new workers, and continued evaluation of the screening tool.